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SUBJECT D'Escoto/CIA/Chile

NEWSCASTER: CNN's special assignment unit has learned one the leading critics of US involvement in Central America played a surprisingly different role during one of the most controversial periods of US foreign policy.

Special assignment correspondent Joe Trento reports.

JOE TRENTO: CNN has learned that Miguel D'Escoto, the bitterly anti-American Foreign Minister of Nicaragua and a Roman Catholic priest once worked with the CIA in Chile in the late 1960's.

CNN has learned that D'Escoto worked for Roger Vekermans [?] a Belgian Jesuit who has funneled millions in CIA and foreign assistance funds to elect candidates in Chile during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations.

According to a top CIA official, and a former US ambassador to Chile, D'Escoto passed CIA funds to US-backed Chilean candidates.

Edward M. Kory served as US ambassador to Chile between 1967 and 1971.

Kory revealed D'Escoto's CIA connections in a recent interview near his Connecticut home.

AMBASSADOR EDWARD M. KORY: If you take the spokesman of a Sandanista government -- the foreign minister of a Sandanista government, a Mary Knoll priest named Miguel D'Escoto -- well,

when I was in Chile, and before I came to Chile, Miguel D'Escoto was a Mary Knoll priest in Chile. And what did he do? He worked on behalf of Vekermans, and to my personal knowledge delivered money for the CIA in the 1969 campaign to one of the candidates that the US government had decided to support.

Now, just think of this for a minute. Here is the foreign minister of a country, spouting straight Castro lines, disliked and being despised by His Holiness the Pope to such an extent that when the Pope recently visited Nicaragua he had to leave the country in order to avoid the confrontation -- the foreign minister left. Guy that gets up in the United Nations every day and denounces us; and who was he? He was in my house for dinner at the invitation of the CIA when I gave a farewell dinner in 1968 -- farewell lunch, I should say. He was on the list of names that Dunman [?] gave me as the best people to contact -- and almost everybody on that list I discovered after I got there were in contact -- I don't say working for -- but in contact with reliable sources for the CIA.

Just think of the absurdity of it.

Now, I held my tongue all these years about something like that -- and there are a great many other things -- because I thought, you know, is it conceivable that this is some kind of a mole that the CIA planted in the Sandanista government.

TRENTO: Kory later found out through Carter Administration officials that D'Escoto was so untrustworthy there was no way he could still be working with the CIA.

The CIA, through spokesman Dale Peterson, said the agency would have no comment on D'Escoto. Attempts to reach D'Escoto for comment were unsuccessful.

Angela Survelas, a spokeswoman for the Nicaraguan embassy said of the charge, that since the United States couldn't kill D'Escoto, the government was putting out what she called preposterous allegations to ruin his reputation.

A high ranking former Latin American specialist for the CIA said the D'Escoto was never paid by the spy agency. The source, who asked that his name not be used, said D'Escoto was used by Vekermans under CIA direction, to deliver payoffs and campaign money to US-backed Chilean politicians.

Joe Trento, CNN special assignment.